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R.I. tech council pushes research, awards grants

Mass High Tech: The Journal of New England Technology - by [Brendan Lynch](#) Mass High Tech

The Rhode Island Science and Technology Advisory Council had a busy week.

The three-year-old coalition of business, government and academic officials made its annual policy recommendations to Gov. Donald Carcieri and handed out its second round of \$1.5 million in collaboration grants to researchers during the last week.

Saul Kaplan, executive director of the **Rhode Island Economic Development Corp.**, said it's all part of an effort to stimulate the state economy, in general, and the high tech and life sciences sectors, in particular.

"We're trying to make innovation central to creating high-wage jobs down here," said Kaplan.

STAC recommended the Slater Technology Fund's Life Sciences Incubator be expanded and moved to Providence's Jewelry District, which is becoming a "nexus for entrepreneurship," said Kaplan. Plans call for the incubator to grow initially from 7,500 square feet to 10,000 square feet, and then expand to 20,000 square feet, Kaplan said.

While still early in the process, Kaplan said he expects the move to cost about \$1 million, and hopes it will be done by the end of the year.

"We want to make sure we have the capacity for those companies coming out of the lab," he said.

STAC also recommended expanding the Rhode Island Research Alliance, which distributes the collaboration grants. The grants, which STAC is recommending be renewed for 2009, are awarded to projects spanning at least two institutions -- companies, universities, hospitals, etc.

Eight of the nine grant awards last week went to life sciences projects.

Researchers at **Brown University** and Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, for instance, won \$170,000 to support development of a new test for anemia. Gregory Crawford, dean of engineering at Brown, said the non-invasive test uses a light-emitting device and an algorithm. The device shoots a burst of light under the eyelid and collects the reflected light to measure hemoglobin levels.

"We're bringing in clinical stuff with technological stuff," Crawford said.

Crawford said the team would use the grant money to hire graduate students to test the product and refine the algorithm.

"It's huge," he said. "It enables us to push it farther along."

Providence-based **NABsys Inc.**, meanwhile, received \$149,000 for its work with **Salve Regina University** in making personal genome sequencing quick and affordable.

NABsys vice president of research and development John Oliver said the STAC efforts are a sign the Ocean State is looking northward, eyeing the strong life sciences cluster in Massachusetts.

"I think there's more and more awareness in Rhode Island that this is a very big economic driver," he said.

NABsys grant represents just 10 percent of the company's budget, but Oliver said the selection process -- peer review by scientists -- has an ancillary benefit.

"It gives future investors ease of mind that you're doing something worthwhile," he said.

Even better, companies don't have to pay back the grants.

"It's free money, non-dilutive cash," Oliver said. "That's always a good thing."

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